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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT AU PRINCE 000317

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SUBJECT: HAITI: LEGISLATORS STEP UP CRITICISM OF PRIME
MINISTER

REF: A. PORT AU PRINCE 93

[1](#)B. 08 PORT AU PRINCE 1680

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Classified By: Amb. Janet A. Sanderson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Prime Minister Michele Pierre-Louis defended her government's response to the devastating 2008 hurricanes in a noisy session of parliament March 17. Sensing political opportunity, a number of Haiti's legislators have criticized PM Pierre-Louis over her government's handling of hurricane relief funds and of damage from early March rains. Pierre-Louis's new critics include some members of the Lespwa coalition and the Coalition of Progressive Parliamentarians, an ad hoc grouping of Deputies that supported her installation as Prime Minister. The increased criticism may presage a time-consuming battle in Parliament over the future of key government ministers, or the Prime Minister herself, draining time and energy away from urgent government business such as rebuilding after the 2008 hurricane season and passing the 2008-09 budget. End summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Prime Minister Michele Pierre-Louis appeared before the Chamber of Deputies March 17 to respond to critics of her government's handling of flooding caused by a series of hurricanes and tropical storms that swept through Haiti just before she assumed office last September. Traditional critics of PM Pierre-Louis joined prominent members of the Lespwa coalition, the largest party in the Senate and the Chamber, and leaders of the Coalition of Progressive Parliamentarians (CPP), an ad hoc group of Deputies heretofore favorable to the Preval/Pierre-Louis government (ref A), in calling for the Prime Minister to testify. In the five-hour session, over thirty deputies from across the political spectrum voiced angry complaints about conditions in their districts and launched vituperative questions at the PM and the Ministers of Public Works, Agriculture, and Environment who accompanied her. Recalling that the flooding had caused USD 900 million in damage, the PM defended her government's actions to generate short-term employment, rebuild schools and infrastructure, and remedy agricultural damage. The Ministers backed up the PM's message with their own detailed presentations.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The March 17 session ended in a scandal. When Chamber President Levaillant Louis-Jeune declared that the session was about to close at the previously scheduled time

of 8:00 PM, one deputy who had not had a chance to speak, Emanuel Fritz Gerald Bourjolly (Fusion, Acquin), advanced to the Chamber President's dais, tore his microphone from the stand, and dashed it against the floor. He threw punches at one of the several deputies who tried to calm him. President Louis-Jeune announced the session closed, apologized to the PM and the ministers, and ordered Chamber security to escort the PM and her party out of the parliament building. The Chamber's leadership bureau will meet March 24 to decide on recommending a vote to sanction Bourjolly. Chamber rules allow the suspension of a deputy for up to six months, and the docking of half the member's pay. Chamber President Louis-Jeune stated that he would suspend further convocations of the PM and various combinations of ministers -- two had been scheduled for later in March -- pending a vote on disciplining Bourjolly.

¶4. (C) The Prime Minister told the Ambassador she thought the question-and-answer session had gone well, but that she had never seen a Haitian parliamentary spectacle quite like that which concluded the session.

¶5. (SBU) The Prime Minister's testimony came after growing criticism of her government's handling of emergency relief funds and its alleged failure to act quickly to mitigate localized flooding in Port-au-Prince and other areas after heavy rains in early March. Some have called for a vote of no confidence in the PM or even for the government to resign.

Habitually outspoken Deputy Steven Benoit (Lespwa, West Department) on March 4 decried what he called the 'unhealthy state' of the capital after the March rains and claiming 'the people have been deceived' by the government's promises to remedy the situation. He suggested the government resign. Benoit is also behind a move to subject

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Minister of Economy and Finance Dorsainvil to a vote of no confidence, although that has yet to materialize. An early December move to interpellate Dorsainvil in the Senate, joined by four of Lespwa's seven Senators, lost momentum after Senate President Kely Bastien (Lespwa, North) brokered a cordial 'working meeting' with the Prime Minister that month (ref B).

¶6. (SBU) During a visit to the Central Plateau the weekend of March 7, the Prime Minister expressed exasperation at the accusations that the government has moved slowly, quoting a Creole proverb that she could not 'draw blood out of a stone.' She suggested that if parliamentary harping continued, she could easily resign. These statements created additional negative political waves. Deputy Hughe Celestin of Lespwa told the press March 12 that it was the government's job to marshal all available resources to allay the people's needs, and that it should indeed be able to 'draw blood from a stone.' If the Prime Minister could not, then she should step aside. Some deputies have stepped up in the PM's defense. Guy Gerard Georges (Union, South) told the press March 12 that the time is not right to interpellate PM Pierre-Louis or Finance Minister Dorsainvil, given that both are preparing for the planned donors' conference in mid-April.

¶7. (C) The initial honeymoon that Pierre-Louis's government enjoyed after taking office following the summer hurricanes ended months ago. Lacking the discipline of strong political parties and organized parliamentary majorities, Haiti's legislators are drifting back into the role in which they are most comfortable, sniping at a government hard-pressed to respond to the basic needs of the population following a natural disaster. PM Pierre-Louis appears condemned to a time-consuming series of appearances before Parliament, a task that will distract members of her government from efforts to address the hard challenges at hand.

SANDERSON